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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 002713

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FROM USUNESCO PARIS
FOR IO/UNESCO - KELLY SIEKMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/16

TAGS: [SCUL](#) [ECON](#) [UNESCO](#)

SUBJECT: USUNESCO: REQUEST FOR GUIDANCE

REF: PARIS 341

1. C) This cable is classified by DCM Andrew Koss, for reason:
1.4 d.

2. (C) Summary and guidance request. The Director General (DG) sent the Deputy Director General, Marcio Barbosa, to see Ambassador Oliver on April 24 to pass the message that he has chosen Francoise Riviere, the DG's "Chef de Cabinet" and a French national as his choice for the new Assistant Director General (ADG) for Culture. Riviere is a 20 year UNESCO veteran who worked actively behind the scenes to promote the cultural expressions convention. We are told that she was also responsible for the note sent three months ago to members of the secretariat telling them that the World Heritage Center would be

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losing its functional autonomy and would be coming under the next ADG Culture. The Ambassador was told that the DG wants to meet with her before making the announcement. We do not know whether Riviere has been told about the DG's decision. Given the Mission's previous instructions from IO not to take a position on Riviere's candidacy, Mission requests immediate guidance on how the Ambassador should respond when she speaks to the DG. End summary.

3. (C) Mission has previously raised the possibility that Francoise Riviere, a French national who is currently the DG's "Chef de Cabinet" with the rank of Assistant Director General, is likely to be chosen as the next ADG for Culture, replacing an Algerian who retired in late February. Since that time, the DG has assumed the culture portfolio himself. This position is key to U.S. interests because the new ADG for Culture will be in charge of promotion and eventually implementation of the cultural expressions convention. We are told that Riviere played a strong backstage role in pushing the convention through, so there is little doubt where she would stand if chosen for the job. France also pushed incessantly during the last Executive Board for the DG and Secretariat to take a more active role in promoting the convention and requesting UNESCO's involvement in helping to get it ratified.

4. (C) Barbosa told the Ambassador that the final six candidates interviewed last week in Paris include, besides Riviere, Francesco Banderin, the Italian director of the World Heritage Center; Katerina Stenou, the Greek director of the cultural policy office (the office responsible for the elaboration and implementation of the cultural expressions convention); a Moroccan; a Kenyan and a Slovenian. He indicated that the other candidates were all very weak and that Riviere was the most qualified of the group. We were also told separately that the French government withdrew its support for another strong candidate and threw its support behind Riviere. The Ambassador told Barbosa that she was amazed that out of 320 candidates, UNESCO was unable to identify a candidate with strong professional qualifications in the field of culture for one of the Organization's most visible and important positions. (Note: Riviere has a degree in comparative literature and no experience with any major cultural organization. She is a competent and powerful inside bureaucrat.)

5. (C) Riviere has already been flexing her muscles. A recent unpopular decision to more closely align the World Heritage Center (which has operated with virtual autonomy until now) with the Cultural Sector has been linked to Riviere. Riviere was also responsible for the DG's statement on the Arab cartoon issue, which upset the Arab states by leaning too far in favor of press freedom. (Comment: we cannot argue with that position, though the consequences were the protracted negotiations during the Executive Board (EB). Riviere served as the DG's representative on the EB's cartoon working group where she was sensitive to U.S. concerns.) Barbosa also has been suggested that the DG is leaning toward Riviere because he knows he can work with her and thinks he can have more control in the area of cultural diversity. (Comment: We doubt this.)

6. (C) Most things cultural at UNESCO are now being linked in one way or another to cultural diversity. This includes a new description of the U.S.-sponsored and funded museum program which is now being referred to as museum partnerships for cultural diversity. We suspect that numerous programs will end

up in the cultural diversity portfolio under the new ADG Culture.

17. (C) There is precedent for reopening competitions at UNESCO. This occurred when no strong candidate emerged during the recent competitions for ADG Administration and the Director of the International Bureau of Education. Even though we have avoided making public comments on this issue, it has been suggested to us that the choice of Riviere would be a setback to the U.S., given our strong opposition to the cultural expressions convention. Although the DG is clearly worried about his choice, he is under pressure from other countries like France to fill this position quickly so that UNESCO can take a more active role in promoting the convention.

OLIVER